

Curricular Innovation in Chinese Heritage Language

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In the past decade there has been growing attention for Chinese language learning. In terms of building K-16 pipelines for the Chinese language, there are many gaps to be closed. Many heritage-language schools exist, but this pipeline is not well connected to formal school programs and there has been a lack of articulation among programs at various levels of the education system.

This presentation emphasizes the importance of designing reading materials that focus on improving the reading proficiencies and socio-cultural experiences in Chinese heritage language students. In the first part of the presentation, a top-down or macro-approach curriculum will be presented. The curriculum designed for the heritage program will be anchored by two theoretical findings. The first is based on Lee and Kim's (2007) article which stressed that Heritage Language (HL) and cultures are part of the American cultural experience. This will be followed by Kagan and Dillon's (2009) recommendation stating that curriculum developers should keep global knowledge in mind while creating content for Heritage Language Learners (HLL).

In the second part, the presenter will demonstrate how the course materials have helped HLL not only acquire literacy, but also acknowledge and appreciate their unique position as an individual living simultaneously among two different cultures. The typical cultural content presented in a language class are things one can observe on the surface, such as Chinese festivals, folk songs and food. However, this approach posts a potential challenge when the students possess prior knowledge of the target culture. Therefore, when teaching HLL, a fresh perspective is more effective and stimulating than familiar facts.

Finally, I hope that the HL curriculum design and implementation will help us further detect the instructional gaps, and enhance the resources and curricula between the Chinese heritage community schools and the Chinese language programs in the Universities.